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ASLEF Journal

AUGUST 2007

Illustration:Ian West

Hello Minister! – Congratulations on the job

NOW – THIS IS WHAT WE WANT...

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AN ISSUE OF LOYALTY

This edition includes an account of the events of 25 years ago when the union became involved in a massive dispute over flexible rostering. I will not go into the details of the events because they are outlined elsewhere (on pages 10 and 11). My concern in this column is to register the great pride I feel when I think of the ASLEF members who showed steadfast courage and unflinching loyalty to the union – even when their jobs, their livelihoods and their futures were at stake.

This month also marks another famous symbol of our history – the Festival of the Tolpuddle Martyrs, where our District 8 always organise a high-profile ASLEF presence. The crime of the pioneer trade unionists of the Dorset village was to take an oath of loyalty to themselves and to their ideals.

That is why they were transported. The authorities, the ruling class of the age, treated the six men - James Brine, James Hammett, George and James Loveless, James Loveless and Thomas and John Standfield - as the most dangerous criminals. The employers went to these lengths because they were desperate to prevent working class loyalty and solidarity. It was vital to their interests that loyalty to a union was stamped out. We should take our cue from them – and recognise that for working men and women it is equally imperative that trade union solidarity should be strengthened.

I know we all find clichés rather embarrassing: and we sometimes think of the phrase 'Unity is Strength' as a parrot-cry. But it is repeated often not because it is an unimaginative formula – but because it expresses in an easy way something fundamentally true.

I confess that I fail to understand why there are an estimated 2,000 train drivers who are not part of ASLEF: they reap the benefits of our negotiations, they enjoy the efforts we – and our predecessors - have made for them over decades: but they are unwilling to join us.

Too often, however, when there are problems at work, these very people come scampering to our reps seeking help. Even though they have played no part in ASLEF, have avoided paying our subs and even sport badges proclaiming their disloyalty, they expect the union to come like a knight in shining armour, mounted on a white charger to come to their aid.

We won't. This is not because we are heartless or unfeeling. It is because loyalty is not dispensed like aspirins. It is won - like respect.

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Call for damages law equality

THE union's solicitors, Thompsons, has launched a campaign to secure equality of bereavement damages across the UK, and specifically for families who have been affected by asbestos.

The firm points out that in England and Wales the level of bereavement compensation under the Fatal Accidents Act 1976 is set at £10,000 - and is only payable to the spouse of the deceased.

In Scotland, however, bereavement payments of up to £30,000 have been made to widows, while other family members such as siblings and children can also receive up to £15,000 each.

Bereavement awards are payable in the event of death caused by negligence, whether through accident or industrial disease. Thompsons argue that families affected by a death from mesothelioma, for example, which leads to immense suffering before death - experience unusually severe grief and an enduring sense of loss. This is exacerbated by knowing that the suffering and death was caused by an employer's negligence.

Thompsons argue that the only way to increase the level of bereavement damages is by a change in the law. Already scores of MPs have backed an Early Day Motion in Parliament which urges the government to 'act swiftly to ensure that those suffering from this deadly disease have the same rights in England and Wales as they do in Scotland'.

Keith Norman says there is no reason for the inequality and has asked members to sign the petition on Thompsons' website www.thompsons.law.co.uk or the Downing Street website http://petitions.pm.gov.uk/asbestosdamages/

He added, 'It is ludicrous that if a driver worked on a route that crosses the border and was exposed to asbestos he or she would be treated differently depending where they lived. If they lived in England their family would be entitled to less bereavement damages that a colleague who drove the same route and was exposed in the same way, but lived over the border.'

'Sweat shop' China looks good to drivers!

THE BBC reported last month, with some indignation, that 'workers in Chinese government offices are going to be made to sweat this summer'. The report says that the unfeeling government has decreed that they cannot use air conditioning to take the temperature below 26C (78.8F).

The reason for this austerity measure is that China cannot supply its energy demand even though it is building two new power stations a week: so it wants to cut energy use.

Amazing, isn't it? A developing country can't use air conditioning to cool temperatures below 26C. But managers of UK railways think it's fine for train drivers to tolerate heat over 27C!

Congratulations Susan!

ASLEF's Susan Greenwell has been re-elected to the TUC LGBT Committee with the second highest vote. At the TUC's specialist conference, she fought off opposition from the UCU union – which opposed ASLEF's motion on Iraq. Susan's searing right of reply led to a big cheer from the delegates and a vote that ended with only the UCU voting against.

Along with fellow ASLEF delegates Ben Wallington, Darran Brown and Zoi Kakouris, visitor Neil Adams and union Equalities Adviser Sharon Allen, Susan marched the ASLEF LGBT banner to support a grateful CWU picket near Congress House.

■ DERAILMENT There was a derailment on London Underground's Central Line just after 0900 on 5 July. 6 of the 8 carriages were derailed on a westbound train between Mile End and Bethnal Green. Normally this would be a reasonably high-speed part of the journey (around 35 mph) but the amount of traffic in the area at this time of day reduced speeds. No significant injuries were reported.

Less planes, more trains in UK travel

FIGURES released this week show that the use of planes for domestic travel is falling while train passenger numbers increase. Keith Norman, ASLEF's general secretary, welcomed the news, and attributes it to an increased awareness of environmental issues, the convenience of going from city centre to city centre, delays caused by increased security at airports, more investment in rail and the doubling of airport tax. He said the trend was 'positive and encouraging', adding that he was convinced it would continue over the long-term.

Last week the Belgian airline VLM scrapped its Liverpool to London flights and the number of domestic travellers at Manchester Airport fell by 8.6% in the first five months of this year – while train journeys between Manchester and the capital increased by 18.2% over the same period.

Business travellers are attracted by improved train services, and especially features like power sockets and WiFi wireless internet which are available at tables in many of the newer carriages.

Maths quiz

Q WHY is there overcrowding on trains? Passenger numbers have gone up by 40% and there has been an increase of 15% in the number of trains.

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EWS pledge on German take-over

EWS has said that when German rail operator Deutsche Bahn (DB) buys the company in a £300m deal there will be 'no impact on employees'. The company says it is 'business as usual, adding, 'We will continue with our business plan, which aims to grow rail freight volumes hauled by the company and expand into new markets.'

EWS will hold onto its corporate identity when the deal is completed within the next few weeks. DB is a German state-owned company and will buy Doncaster-based EWS from current owners Canadian National Railway and private equity firms Berkshire Partners and Fay Richwhite. EWS accounts for 70% of British rail freight and operates more than 1,000 trains a day.

DB is also taking a majority stake in Spanish operator Transfesa. One feature of the buy-out is that German owners will take over the running of the Royal Train.

Glyn finally gets his Nexus damages

A Newcastle Upon Tyne court last month insisted that NEXUS - the Tyne and Wear Passenger Transport Executive – should pay the £7,300 damages it owes ASLEF member Glyn Richardson, a metro train driver from Newcastle.

Glyn was injured in August 2003 following the failure of an overhead line. He made a claim via the free legal help scheme ASLEF has with Thompsons solicitors (see details on page 23).

The settlement is the end of a long distasteful saga. ASLEF secured compensation for Glyn in October 2006, but his employer appealed against the decision – meaning that Glyn did not get a penny of the money due to him while the legal process continued. The matter finally went to Appeal at the end of June.

Glyn's accident happened when the metro train he was driving stopped near a signal because of the overhead line failure. For safety reasons, Mr Richardson had to make several trips to and from the nearest Metro Station in order to walk all his passengers to safety. He takes up the story:

'When the train broke down, I had to walk on ballast – the rubble which is laid in between the tracks. It is a very rough and an uneven surface to walk upon. This caused injury to my back and my shoulder. I also had to help the passengers with their luggage. It was very painful and I was off work for over 3 months."

Glyn's ASLEF branch secretary Trevor Graham said, he was obviously pleased at the outcome, but that it was 'an outrage' that NEXUS had fought the case at all. ' Glyn was injured due to the employer's negligence, while he was carrying out his duties and ensuring the safety of passengers. Yet he is rewarded with his employer trying to deny him compensation!'

An orthopaedic surgeon and a neurosurgeon had both, in October 2006, confirmed that walking on the ballast was the cause of Glyn's back and shoulder injuries.

Tony Scott, a Thompsons personal injury specialist pointed out that had Glyn not had ASLEF backing and support he would not have been able to continue with the claim and secure the compensation he deserved.

RAIL UNIONS UNITE ON ROAD TRAINS Leaders of all the rail unions have sent a joint letter to the Department of Transport putting forward six points rejecting longer and heavier lorries:

- The sheer size – the 60 tonner weights the same as a Challenger tank and is the length of a competition swimming pool
- There is no mechanism to keep them off local and minor roads
- Safety concerns, especially in collisions or overtaking
- Environmental issues
- They will have little effect on road congestions, unlike rail freight (a single train can replace 50 lorries) and
- Public opinion opposes them.

MORE RAIL INVESTMENT A London Assembly report has called for major new investment in the capital's rail services to cope with future demand. Its transport committee said today that without more cash 'the network will not be able to meet its requirements'.

The report pointed out that three quarters of all UK rail journeys start or end in the city – and that a third of those exceed the overcrowding guidelines – but says that London does not get an equivalent share of

The report calls for the capital to get a specific pot of money from the Government's Transport Innovation Fund as well as extra business levies as an alternative means of funding. It concludes that 'an integrated transport policy is essential for the growth both of London and of the UK.'

LONDON ASSEMBLY DEMANDS FRANCHISES FOR MIDLANDS The Department for Transport (DfT) has announced that bus and rail firm Stagecoach has won the contract to operate rail routes in the East Midlands from 11 November until April 2015.

Meanwhile the London and Birmingham Railway Ltd (a subsidiary of Govia) has been awarded the contract to run the West Midlands franchise for the same period. The company promises a fleet of 37 new electric Desiro trains by July 2009 and a new class 172 diesel trains to replace the existing class 150 DMUs operating on the Snow Hill line services in the Birmingham area by July 2010.

For more details: www.aslef.org.uk/news

Arriva has won its biggest UK rail contract with the £5.4 billion award of the new Cross Country franchise that operates services stretching from Aberdeen to Penzance.

COMPANY NEWS

First Capital Connect - Pay & Harmonisation Members voted by 59% in favour of accepting the 2007/8 First Capital Connect Pay and Harmonisation proposals.

– Rest Day Working ASLEF is prepared to sanction Rest Day Working on First Capital Connect until 28th July 2007 subject to continued monitoring by our representatives.

Chiltern Railways ASLEF is prepared to sanction Rest Day Working on Chiltern Railways until 28th July 2007 subject to continued monitoring by our representatives.

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ASLEF LEUKAEMIA APPEAL

Last month ASLEF received a letter from Bishops Stortford Branch 024 which explained how a young cousin of one of the branch's members has been diagnosed with a rare form of childhood Leukaemia which can only be treated in the United Sates at a cost of £200,000. We are therefore appealing to all branches to make generous donations to this campaign to offer much needed hope to the family of one of our colleagues.

In June 2005 George Yeomans, at just 7 years old, was diagnosed with Neuroblastoma (a rare form of childhood cancer). During the last 18 months, George has bravely undergone almost continuous rigorous treatment at Great Ormond Street Hospital, resulting in his final test results in December 2006 being clear. However, just 4 months later, George's family's world has been torn apart again, as sadly the cancer has returned.

There is no treatment for recurrent Neuroblastoma in the UK, leaving the family with no option but to seek treatment in the USA, that is estimated to cost hundreds of thousands of pounds. George's family need to urgently raise an initial deposit of £200,000 in able to begin this life saving treatment, as well as funds for the necessary costs (air fares, accommodation etc).

The ASLEF General Secretary and the Executive Committee are asking all branches to undertake a huge effort and arrange donations to offer this ASLEF member's family real hope. As Keith Norman explains, "I ask that all branches make a donation to help the family of our colleague and offer this brave little boy a real chance of survival. Anything that you can do to help would be greatly appreciated."

Full details of George's story can be found on the appeal website: www.georgeyeomansappeal.org where you can also make an online donation.

Donations can be made onilne (http://www.georgeyeomansappeal.org/donate.asp) or by sending a cheque to: The George Yeomans Appeal - 2Simple Trust, 3-4 Sentinel Square, Brent Street, Hendon, London, NW4 2EL

If you have any questions at all, or can help in any way, please contact Louise Burrows on: 07984 326 950 or email her at: samsredhouse@aol.com.

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Closing date: 28th September 2007

direct rail services
www.directrailservices.com

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Pensioners' Parliament 2007 says Labour hasn't delivered

DAVE PRESS and myself represented ASLEF at this year's Pensioners Parliament in wet and windy Blackpool – but the weather didn't stop a bright and noisy march from the North Pier to the Winter Gardens, where the Parliament was officially opened by the Lord Mayor of Blackpool.

Joe Harris, the General Secretary of the NPC, gave a report on progress on last year's Parliamentary Bills to the 2,000 delegates before we began a parliamentary debate. It was planned that Labour, Conservative and Lib Dem MPs would speak but unfortunately Labour Party Chair Hazel Blears sent a message saying she had to attend a friend's funeral. This didn't go down well – especially as no one was sent in her place.

Of course the Tory Shadow Work and Pensions Minister Nigel Waterson and Lib Dem MP David Laws seized on the lack of a Labour spokesperson in their speeches. They were followed by contributions from delegates and the first session ended with a vote condemning the Government's disgraceful neglect of older people. The Parliament also unanimously

carried a resolution rebuking the failure to provide a senior representative to attend this important event as a replacement for Hazel Blears. 2,000 delegates to the UK's largest representative gathering of pensioners expect those in power to listen and respect the views of older people and address their concerns.

Delegates will raise this issue through their organisations, with the Prime Minister and with Labour MPs.

Wednesday morning saw debates on Healthy Living, the National Insurance Fund Bill and the Public Services Bill with the afternoon session covering the Housing Bill, Lifelong Learning and Principles of the NHS Bill.

Away from the conference hall, we enjoyed an entertaining Social Evening.

The final day had Campaign Sessions covering Dignity in Care, Fighting Poverty, Pensioners and the Media and The right to Free Travel. Peter Rayner (whose background is well known to ASLEF) spoke excellently on this subject.

The Parliament concluded with a Keynote Speech from Professor Alan Walker from Sheffield University, who is the Patron of the NPC. He analysed Labour's decade in office, pointing out what pensioners had been promised in 1997 and how little they had failed to deliver.

Both Dave and myself thoroughly enjoyed the Pensioners' Parliament and we'd like to thank Sharon Allen and all those involved in making the arrangements for us to attend.

Alan Taylor ASLEF Retired Members' Section

ASLEF condemns discrimination at Pensioners' Convention

DAVE WEDDLE and myself attended the National Pensioners' Convention conference at Nottingham University at the end of June. The NPC is funded by membership affiliations and gifts and although it is a gradual process we do seem to be getting better conditions for pensioners.

Most rule changes fell, and most policy motions were carried. These included proposals condemning the fact that a single person's pension is now £40 below the poverty line and calling for personal as well as nursing care to be provided at no cost and without means testing.

I moved the proposal on Age Discrimination for ASLEF, making the following points:

The Equality Act of 2006 contained no mention of age discrimination

The Employment Equality Act regulations of 2006 are only concerned with discrimination at work

The law still leaves pensioners (and the under 18s) open to age discrimination.

One delegate pointed out that he had been refused car hire because he was over 70 before the conference voted to exert all the pressure it could – and encourage affiliates to do the same - for fresh legislation to cover areas other than employment.

We voted against a move to have all NPC affiliates, such as ASLEF, to instruct branches to affiliate to NPC regions.

A letter was sent to the new Prime Minster requesting a meeting to discuss the future of the basic state pension which remains the foundation of income for most retired people. We hope to see many colleagues at the Lobby of Parliament on 24 October.

Ernie Whitfield
RMS Committee Member

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A Statement concerning the Finances of the Union by the General Secretary and the Executive Committee.

This years Annual Conference debated the finances of the union with detailed reports from the Trustees and Financial Auditors. As a result the delegates took the decision to allow contributions to increase by up to £2.00 per month for Scale 1 (currently members with a salary of £21,500 and above) members.

Whilst a small minority of outside commentators attempt to make great play on this issue, most notably a report in the Guardian recently, we believe that the membership is entitled to the facts.

Costs such as Staff, Officers and delegates wages, electricity, taxation, postage and fuel have clearly increased since 2002 while subscriptions have remained unchanged over that five-year period.

The Executive Committee and the General Secretary recognise the importance of increasing contributions in order to retain the principles set out in ASLEF's constitution. We also recognise the increasing gap between the various grades our members are employed in and their respective rates of pay. We have members employed by companies as 'Level II Trainee Drivers' being paid just £12,764, we have members on part time / reduced hours workers, Light Rail workers, Depot Drivers, Drivers on Probationary Rates of pay, Year 1 & 2 Drivers through to Driver members earning salaries well above £40,000. Unlike other organisations, we do not believe that contributions should have one flat rate with lower paid members subsidising the higher paid.

We understand the importance of ASLEF in the workplace for all our members regardless of their rate of pay and believe that our rates should not preclude anyone in the 'line of promotion' joining and having the right to first rate representation. The Scale Contribution System based on salaries will therefore remain and be extended as allowed for in the Salisbury Branch Item 20, which was noted by Conference. The Monthly Contributions will be as follows;

- Scale 4 Membership ~ £9.32 (Salaries of less than £16,000)
- Scale 3 Membership ~ £14.95 (Salaries of £16,000 to £24,999)
- Scale 2 Membership ~ £21.45 (Salaries of £25,000 to £29,999)
- Scale 1 Membership ~ £23.45 (Salaries above £30,000)

This means that only members who are employed on salaries in excess of £30,000 will see an increase in their current rate of contributions; scale 1 contributions will remain less than 1% of earnings in comparison to the 1.25% we paid as members under the old BR system.

The Guardian report said that our subscriptions had increased by "..almost 20% to stem further losses.". Perhaps Mr Henke, the Westminster Correspondent should be transferred to report on education given that the actual rise in subscriptions will be less than 10%. In addition, it is important to realise that much work has been done to make the union more efficient whilst retaining our effectiveness. In the June 2007 Finance Report, we as an Executive Committee, were advised of the forecast for the year ending December 2007. That forecast indicates ASLEF returning to a financial surplus and does not include the increases agreed and outlined above and without the sale of our head office. We do however recognise the importance of building on that for the future.

ASLEF is a small independent craft trade union renowned for its industrial strength because of the essential and skilled work our members are employed to carry out within the rail industry. We have long been proud of our independence and integral to ASLEF representation, since our formation in 1880, is the principle of drivers representing drivers. This sets us apart from other general unions.

The General Secretary and the Executive Committee have a responsibility to ensure that ASLEF remains financially viable, to improve benefits and deliver quality representation for the membership in workplace.

Alan Donnelly
EC President

Keith Norman
General Secretary

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DRIVERS SHOULDN'T PAY TO RELIEVE CONGESTION!

This year's AAD delegates proposed a campaign to secure congestion charge exemption for train drivers who are only entering the payment Zone to provide a public transport system. Specifically the aim is to ensure that drivers are not penalised for moving into or out of city centres because they are on early or late turns. While currently there is only a congestion charge in the capital, other cities will be introducing similar schemes in the future. In this article we outline the campaign objectives, the background – and propose a way forward …

'Train drivers should be exempt from congestion charge'

WHAT WE WANT

To ensure that train drivers are exempted from paying the congestion charge when they drive into cities to provide a public transport system. Specifically this involves drivers who cannot get safe public transport into or out of the city because they are either driving the first and/or last trains of the day.

WHY WE WANT IT

The AAD motion noted the proposed expansion of congestion charging and road pricing; and

- instructed the Executive Committee to consult with all relevant affected authorities to exempt from such charging all staff who are required to attend and get home at such hours where no rail transport services is available.

In the debate it was stressed that drivers of both sexes can face dangerous journeys from and into the city when trains are not available. Even 24-hour buses don't cover a wide enough area, so many train drivers have no choice but to drive their cars to work. In a year congestion charges for one driver could amount to anything up to £1,000

NOT JUST A LONDON ISSUE

Apart from the capital, 7 areas - Durham, the West Midlands, Greater Manchester, Tyne and Wear, Shrewsbury, Cambridgeshire and Bristol – were given government funding in 2005 to look at road charging.

London Mayor Ken Livingstone doesn't want to extend the Congestion Charge area any further because he thinks that the government will shortly be moving towards a national road pricing system.

CURRENT CONGESTION CHARGE REGULATIONS

Currently within London the area covered by the charge is the 'Inner Ring Road' which links Euston Road, Pentonville Road, Tower Bridge, Elephant & Castle, Vauxhall Bridge Road, Park Lane and Marylebone Road.

On 19 February 2007 the zone was extended to the west to cover the areas of Bayswater, Notting Hill, North and South Kensington, High Street Kensington, Knightsbridge, Chelsea, Belgravia and Pimlico.

The charge (of £8) between 0700 am and 1800 from Monday to Friday with the exception of Bank Holidays and the period between Christmas Day and New Year's Day.

WHO DOESN'T PAY?

Exemptions from the discounts currently are

- Disabled people, or institutions for disabled people, who hold a Blue Badge (formerly known as Orange Badge)
- Residents living within the congestion charging zone
- Drivers of alternative fuel vehicles
- Motorcycles 1 meter or less in width and 2 meters or less in length
- Accredited breakdown organisations
- Drivers of electronically propelled vehicles
- Patients who are clinically assessed as being too ill to travel to an appointment on public transport.

NHS staff and fire-fighters may also be able to claim a reimbursement of the Congestion Charge from their employers for certain operational journeys undertaken as part of their work –but this does not include driving to and from work.

Also exempt are two-wheelers, taxi and emergency services vehicles.

PLACING THE CLAIM

The executive will be considering how best to progress the claim. There would seem to be two ways to do this:

Seeking exemption from the office of the Mayor

When the issue was raised with the London Mayor in 2003, he expressed some sympathy with the situation, but took the view that the union should approach the relevant employers. There may be other ways we can approach the Mayor on the issue, especially as he is seeking later train-running hours on the tube.

Seeking recompense from employers

There is a case for making this claim of the employers – especially as it will effectively reduce the take-home pay of our members if they are liable for the congestion charge.

Immediate approaches can only be made in London, as it is the only city with a congestion charge currently – but the union is aware that whatever is achieved in the capital will set a precedent for other cities as they set up their own systems.

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ASLEF in the sha

It is 25 years since the union took national strike action in the 1982 flexible rostering dispute (effectively the introduction of variable start and finish times). General Secretary Keith Norman says, 'It is an appropriate time to salute the tens of thousands of ASLEF members who had the courage, principles and determination to stand by the union at a difficult and dangerous time.

'I don't think anyone in the country had realised the depth of Thatcher's hatred of trade unions, or what she was prepared to sacrifice to win a battle with our movement. We could scarcely believe that in her eyes a victory over a trade union was worth more than the whole railway service of the UK.

'I believe our dispute alerted the labour movement to the extremism of Thatcher's agenda: it is a tragedy that the TUC and other unions failed to heed the warnings and so neglected to organise themselves against the attacks to come.

'We owe the men and women who stood by this union and their principles in the face of enormous hardships a debt we can never repay – but in the process they created a bond among train drivers that will never be broken.'

THE DISPUTE

The dispute of 1982 had it roots in bitterness caused the previous year when the Board of British Rail refused to honour that part of the 1981 pay deal which promised a 3% increase backdated to August. The BR board said that it would only pay if the union agreed to 'changes in working practices'. After a month of 48 hour strikes, bans on Sunday working and an overtime ban an independent enquiry was set up under Lord McCarthy. That Enquiry concluded that the Board had given a commitment which it should honour, and accordingly BR conceded. However, many members of the Board, encouraged by the newly-elected government of Margaret Thatcher, was determined to even the score.

Central to this was the union's determination to maintain the 8 hour day, established 63 years previously. The BR board, encouraged by the Thatcher government, was determined to crush it.

In May BR's personnel director Cliff Rose said the company would not seek investment for rail until ASLEF had conceded flexible rostering. The Rail Staffs' National Tribunal backed the employer.

In June BR drew up plans to impose new rosters which did not include the 8-hour working day. The intention was to begin to impose them on individuals at chosen depots. The union held meetings all over the country and, having failed to make any progress in talks, declared a national strike of ASLEF members from Sunday 4 July 'until further notice'.

The union attempted to have the dispute referred to the conciliation service ACAS, but management would not agree unless ASLEF had already agreed to implement flexible rostering in 71 locations.

The Thatcher-inspired BR Board then escalated the dispute by announcing its intention to close the railway system on 24 July – which would involve the sacking of every employee taking industrial action.

The strike was 97% solid even on management figures – but by 17 July it was evident that the Board and the government would sacrifice the railway to win a battle against the union. Further, the TUC would not organise support and the NUR's general secretary, Sid Weighell, was actively unhelpful.

The union had no alternative but to call off the strike, which it did on 18 July, agreeing to negotiate on flexible rostering.

It was Thatcher's first confrontation with the unions – something she had planned and anticipated for years – and had laid the way for the planned Employment Bill which would make unions liable in law for unofficial action, tighten restrictions on 'closed shops' and outlaw strikes about demarcation, political or international issues.

After the ASLEF dispute, she moved on to declare war on organised labour in the mining industry and the Wapping newspaper dispute. Had other unions expressed their solidarity with ASLEF in 1982, realising that Thatcher was hell-bent on confrontation – the history of the labour movement during the 1980s could have been very different.

Another sad effect of the action was to create a major rift between the NUR (now the RMT) and ASLEF. There is no doubt that Sid Weighell let our union – and his own – down both industrially and personally – a point illustrated by the

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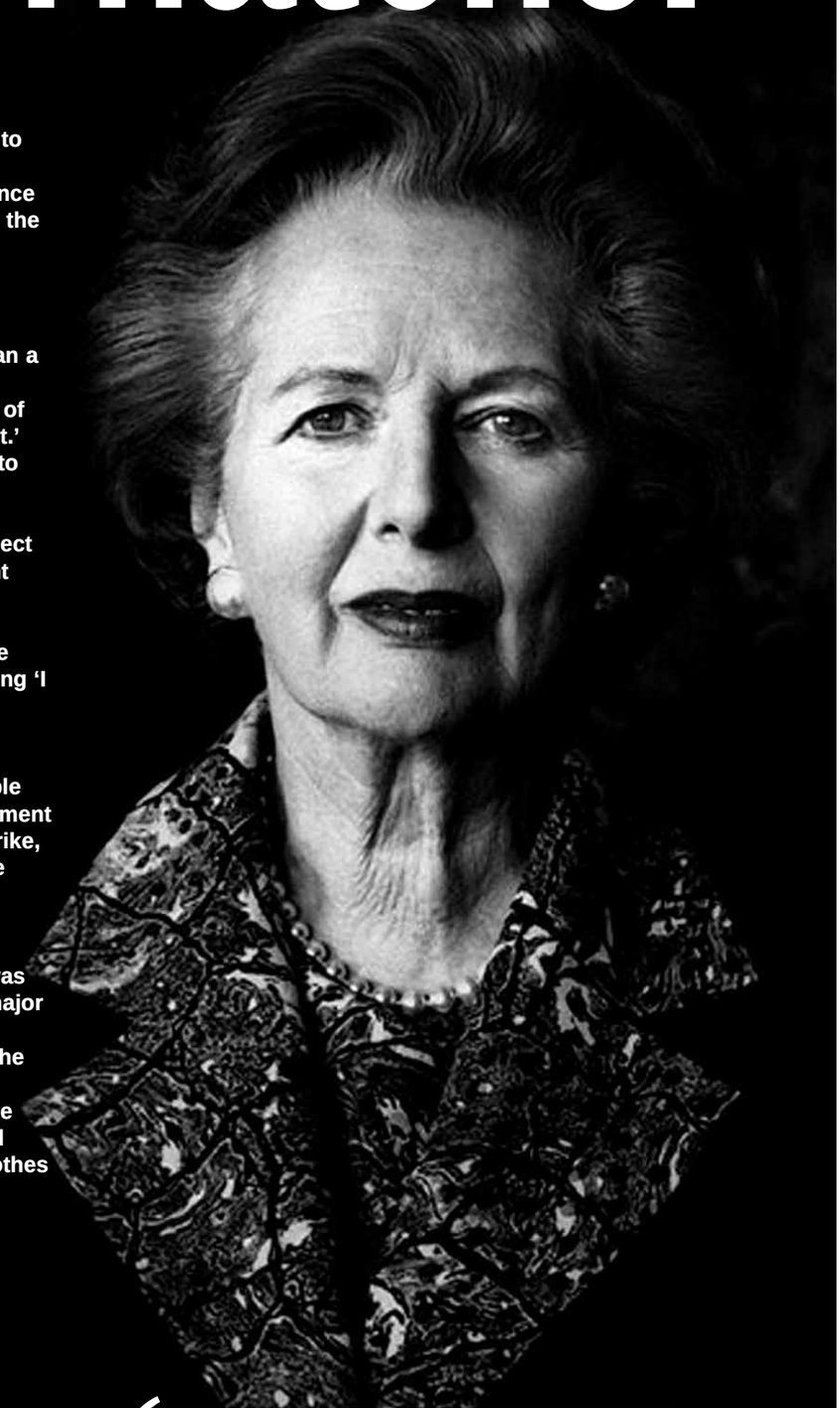
adow of Thatcher



celebrated remark of then EC President Derrick Fullick to that individual during 'discussions' at the TUC about amalgamation of the two unions. 'If you call me a liar once again, I will get you by your braces and drop you down the lift-shaft.' Clearly there was to be no meeting of minds!

WHAT THEY SAID

Trade Minister Cecil Parkinson : 'Today, a little more than a week after the liberation of our British people on the Falklands, there are trade union leaders and a minority of politicians apparently intent on bringing Britain to a halt.'

Mrs Thatcher called on ASLEF members to 'respond to the Spirit of the Falklands' and announced that the government would not invest in rail without 'excellent productivity practices, not those agreed in 1919' – a direct reference to the 8-hour day agreement. The government was now clearly active in the dispute.

The Guardian's leader column said, 'ASLEF's leaders merit some ritual humiliation' while the Sun's front page headline quoted the Chairman of BR, Peter Parker, saying 'I will smash ASLEF'. Cartoons showed seedy drivers denying wounded Falklands heroes a means of getting home.

Labour Leader Michael Foot: 'ASLEF offered a sensible way out of the problem, but the Board, with the Government pushing them, were adamant that they would have a strike, and they got one. The Conservatives want to smash the unions and create a servile workforce.'

74 Labour MPs pledged themselves 'ready to assist ASLEF members in any way we may be asked.'

TUC chief Len Murray, when told that the BR board was threatening mass dismissals, 'It would be a matter of major concern.'(!)

Ray Buckton at the special AAD called at the end of the strike: 'The threat of mass dismissals unnerved many members, with even the solid Western Region telling me they would go back rather than lose their jobs. "I would look daft standing alone in Trafalgar Square with no clothes on shouting, "'Up the Reds' - and nobody with me."

1982 AT A GLANCE …

JANUARY - Mark Thatcher missing in the Sahara.
FEB – first budget airline, Laker Airways, goes bust
MARCH - Mary Whitehouse obscenity trial against the National Theatre stopped
APRIL - Argentina invades Falklands
MAY - Sinking of the Belgrano with 368 deaths
JUNE - Ceasefire in Falklands
JULY - Hyde Park IRA bombs
AUGUST - PLO forced out of Beirut after Israel invades Lebanon
SEPTEMBER – Over 1,000 refugees massacred in Beirut camps
OCTOBER - Mary Rose rises after 437 years
NOVEMBER - Polish Solidarity leader Walesa released from detention
DECEMBER - Spain opens border with Gibraltar

'The Thatcher-inspired threat to close the railway system would involve the sacking of every employee taking industrial action'

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HELLO MINISTER! CONGRATULATIONS ON

NOW – THIS IS WH

Ruth Kelly has been appointed the new Minister of Transport and the union is making plans to meet her in the near future. Meanwhile Keith Norman spells out four issues on which he will be seeking commitments.

'We believe these are the four issues of major concern to our members that are appropriate to raise with the minister – and which she has the authority to advance,' says Keith.

Specifically ASLEF wants assurances that the minister will:

- **encourage the movement of freight by rail**
- **get rid of the threat of imposing 40 tonne 'train-truck' vehicles onto our roads**
- **ensure that every franchise authorised includes a commitment to satisfactory cab conditions**
- **make a test case by keeping one franchise in public hands, running it to standards demanded by the public - and comparing its performance with privatised companies.**

'It is traditional to greet a new minister with a 'wish-list',' says general secretary Keith Norman. 'But not one of these items is extreme or unreasonable.

'We are not asking for the moon – we are seeking gradual progress on issues on which we would expect a Labour minister to be supportive.'

ENCOURAGE RAIL FREIGHT

The fast-track to reducing transport's carbon footprint is to increase rail freight – the environmentally friendly alternative to road haulage. Remember: a single freight train can remove 50 HGVs from our roads!

There is a clear demand for rail freight - the Network Rail Freight Route Utilisation Strategy of March 2007 forecasted a 50% growth in tonne kilometres by 2014. Recent Office of Rail Regulation (ORR) figures show a 4% increase in billion tonne kilometres for the past year.

However the industry needs a clear and consistent framework, supported by the Government, to realise growth which gives the industry the confidence to invest.

A fair 'track access' regime is needed which recognises the full economic, environmental and social benefits of rail. Grants are also important to offset the initial start-up costs of a transfer to rail. Rail is also a safer way of transporting freight, with driver safety between 2 and 3 times lower than the risk for HGV drivers –without considering car occupants, pedestrians and cyclists.

The industry has identified a list of key gauge and capacity enhancements needed on the network to provide a fit-for-purpose infrastructure which will include diversionary routes. These can be seen at www.freightonrail.org.uk (under Hot Topics). We want to see the government's Transport Innovation Fund (TIF) enabling 5 key projects to be carried forward as a priority.

The outcome of the Planning White Paper is crucial for rail freight - which cannot grow without planning permission for new interchanges. We need a national policy statement on rail freight – including ensuring that local authorities and Public Inquiries should have to take account of NPSs (National Policy Statements) on interchange schemes. There is a crying need for detailed rail freight planning guidance for local authority planners and for use at Planning Inquiries.

GET RID OF THE 'LONGER VEHICLE' THREAT

We want the minister to reject the trials of longer and heavier lorries - known as LHVs. These monsters range from 25.5 to 30 metres long, and weigh between 60 to 84 tonnes: the smaller of these – the 60-tonner - is 50% longer and over a third heavier than existing 44 tonne lorries.

LHVs are totally unsuited to our roads on economic, environmental and safety grounds.

The promoters of LHVs claim that these vehicles will be restricted to motorways and dual carriageways - but there is no mechanism to enforce restricted access and anyway they will want access to depots.

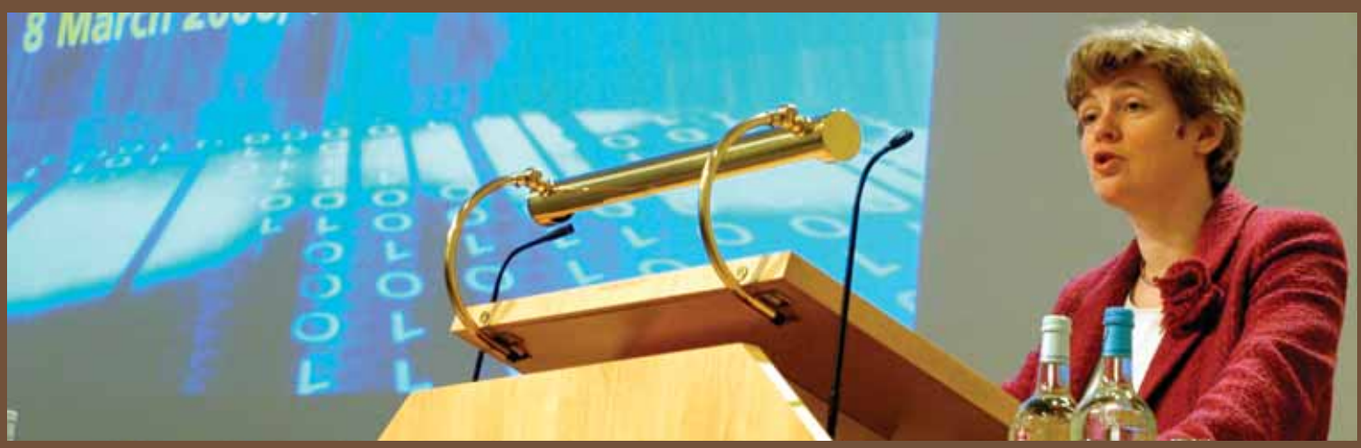
LHVs will mean more lorry-miles - not fewer, as their supporters suggest. Demand will be stimulated if transport becomes cheaper at point of use, as modal choice is dominated by price. Trainloads of freight will be forced back onto the congested road network as rail freight is undermined. Freightliner says up to 66% of the deep-sea container rail market could be lost to road with the introduction of the 25.5 metre B-double. Analysis by Oxera for EWS in May 2007 found that 40% of rail aggregates flows and 20% of metals flows could transfer to road if LHVs were permitted.

RUTH KELLY IN 7 QUICK POINTS ...

- **Born in May 1968, Ruth is MP for Bolton West**
- **She won her seat from the Conservatives in 1997 while heavily pregnant.**
- **As a mother of four children, she refused to work the long hours normally associated with ministers and refused to take a Treasury 'red box' home in the evening.**
- **Before her appointment as Secretary of State for Transport last month, Ruth had been a financial secretary at the Treasury, Education minister, Local Government minister and Minister for Women and Equality.**
- **Ruth is the youngest woman ever to sit in the Cabinet.**
- **She was educated at Queen's College, Oxford, and the London School of Economics, where she gained an MSc in Economics.**
- **Ruth is a fan of Bolton Wanderers football club.**

ON THE JOB

HAT WE WANT ....



The effect of accidents will be proportionately greater because of the extra weight, and there are severe safety implications from braking distances, stability, manoeuvrability and overtaking. DfT research showed that HGVs were twice as likely to be involved in fatal accidents as cars.

The Government should also be aware of poor compliance with existing road regulations on speed limits, drivers' hours and weight, which put the public at risk. In 2005 on major non-built-up single carriage roads 76% of articulated HGVs exceeded their 40 mph limit by 6mph on average, with 28% exceeding the limit by more than 10 mph. A majority of the public opposes larger lorries – and like them, ASLEF wants to see the Government campaigning for longer and heavier trains!

MAKE SURE EVERY FRANCHISE INCLUDES A COMMITMENT TO SATISFACTORY CAB CONDITIONS

We want Transport Minister Ruth Kelly to write into every franchise an obligation on the part of the employer to agree cab conditions with the union, and to ensure that they are implemented.

We need to ensure that the minister endorses and actively supports our SQUASH campaign for Safe, Quiet, User-friendly, Air-conditioned, Specially seated and Healthy driving cabs. Even in a privatised industry the minister has the power to insist on specific conditions before letting a franchise. We insist that every bidder must be prepared to finance alterations and improvements to cabs where this is necessary. The logical way to ensure that those conditions are of an acceptable standard is to ensure that they have been approved by the experts – train drivers represented by ASLEF.

Squash has been one of our most successful campaigns in recent times. All the significant UK rail companies are committed to trials or improvements to cab conditions, notably in the freight area with the Class 66 cabs – and this is despite the fact that 6 months ago there was no movement at all.

The rail companies have accepted that our SQUASH objectives are beneficial to health and safety. The ORR and RSSB have supported our claims: so we say that, given this unanimous endorsement, the minister should be prepared to ensure improved standards become a permanent feature of our railways.

We are not asking the minister to interfere by introducing improved standards – but to give its authority and endorsement to standards agreed by professionals within the industry. We think it is right to take safety features away from the arena of negotiation.

The union's case that cab conditions are a safety issue is no longer a matter of debate. It has not been challenged by anyone in the industry – and it is a fact that during the hot weather last year, SPADs increased by 62%. That is clearly something that calls for action by the Government: it is too serious to leave to industrial negotiating machinery.

MAKE A TEST CASE BY KEEPING ONE TOC FRANCHISE IN PUBLIC HANDS

We want the new minister to retain at least one Train Operating Company in public hands, excluding it from the franchising process. Ideally of course, the union's policy – and, incidentally, that of the Labour Party - is to return the whole network to the public. However, we see retaining one TOC as a reasonable temporary compromise.

What advantages would come of such an experiment?

Firstly, the public firm could act as a model or standard by which other franchises could be compared. We believe that if a public, not-for-profit franchise provided rail transport with the funding a private firm would have received – then it would do a much better job in terms of providing the type of services the public wants. It would also have the staff commitment and public service ethic to improve working lives and conditions.

Secondly, in place of a rather sterile and divisive statement of prejudices – like 'public bad, private good' - we could be in the position to have a sensible and serious debate about rail ownership. If during the experimental period it was proven that a public not-for-profit franchise had no advantages, the government's continuation with the Tory's privatisation exercise would be to some extent justified. This is something we would be prepared to test.

It seems to us that proposing this experiment is entirely reasonable. There is clearly dissatisfaction with the privatised network from all quarters: simply to hide from the issue will not improve it. The Government should not be afraid of testing new ideas or reasonable alternatives.

Finally, our proposal would be at nil-cost to the Treasury. The experiment would begin when a current franchise ends and the public TOC would receive no more than a private franchisee.

The government is prepared to subsidise private firms by £187 million a week to run a rail network extremely inefficiently – why won't it give the opportunity to a public firm to see if – and how – improvements can be made?

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Small companies matter too

says Nicky Whitehead - Organiser - District No 4

IN THE now not-so-new fragmented railway we live and work in, it is the big TOC's and FOC's that get most of the headlines and coverage in the media – including our own Journal.

I have my fair share of big companies – I'm the lead officer for the two biggest, EWS and Northern Rail, and perhaps the most headline grabbing - GNER. With a joint ASLEF membership approaching 4,500, more than a quarter of the entire membership, they rightly demand a large proportion of my time. However in this article I would like to concentrate on the three, soon to be four, smaller operators that I have dealings with.

A few months ago I read EC Member for District No 6 Dave Calfe's excellent piece in the Journal regarding the dangers and pitfalls of working in open access companies. Many of these don't recognise ASLEF (or any other union), have poor conditions and in some cases leave question marks over safety. I have no doubt that these dangers were the objectives of the Tory Government at the time of rail privatisation in an effort to reduce the influence of ASLEF and the other rail unions and therefore force down conditions of service for all rail workers. Whilst we continue the struggle for recognition in these companies Hull Trains, I believe, shows what can be achieved by ASLEF in these companies.

Hull Trains started in 2000 with only 8 drivers to fill a void to provide a direct rail link between Hull and London. By December this year the establishment will be 24, a 4 day week with Sundays within the working week will be in place and a salary of around £39k. A more complete set of T&C's have been agreed and implemented with as many ASLEF Charter aspirations met as any other TOC or FOC in the industry. Much of the credit for these achievements should go to the Drivers Council Rep Mark Ward and the Local Rep at the time John Thacker.

Grand Central is hoping to emulate Hull Trains in its commercial success, whilst we are there to ensure we get similar or better agreements in place for our drivers. Recognition with Grand Central is only the start of course, and a meeting with GC will discuss terms and conditions and meet members already working for the company. The schedule for GC to run services has now been put back to September - by which time we aim to have agreed full terms and conditions for our members.

Maintrain meanwhile has been reintegrated back into Midland Mainline since the end of April. This means that our members have been given the option of transferring their pension back into the MML section of the RPS, the deficit paid off by MML and lower contribution rates. The reintegration will also protect our members at Neville Hill within the forthcoming East Midlands franchise. Back in 2003 Maintrain drivers had 2 different pay rates, the original drivers "red inked" at almost £2,500 above the newer drivers. I will never forget the magnificent support the original drivers showed as they stood shoulder to shoulder on the picket lines at Neville Hill - despite the fact they would gain nothing from the dispute to harmonise pay levels.

Fragmentation of the rail industry has caused many problems but ASLEF through the tenacity of our reps and members will always rise to the occasion. We have been strong enough to adapt to change and offer the best support and leadership to all our members. However we must strive for the rail industry to be brought back under public control in line with the 2004 Labour Party Conference decision, with a democratic management structure comprising representatives of passengers, railway workers, and Government and to stop public subsidies going to private pockets.

Yours for Peace, Equality and Internationalism

Liverpool Street re-union – 29 sept

THE Liverpool Street Welfare and Social Club is holding its Annual Re-Union on Saturday 29th September. This year it will be combined with a retirement function for 3 long serving drivers - Steve Ford, 'Bootsy' Wellington and Alan Chambers – who are all retiring after over 45 years service.

All past and present members, colleagues and friends are welcome to join us to wish them a fond farewell into their retirement (or just to make sure they go!)

The function is being held on Saturday 29 September in the Downstairs Function Room of 'Dirty Dicks' Public House, Bishopsgate. This is near Liverpool Street Station – come out of the station by way of the Bishopsgate stairs, cross the road and head left. 'Dirty Dicks' can be found 2 minutes walk away.

We look forward to seeing you there – Any queries please contact John Thorpe, the Secretary of the Liverpool Street Welfare & Social Club on 01621 851110.

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Excellent Course

I'M SURE I speak for my fellow branch secretaries who attended the training course at head office last month. A great time was had by all; in particular the humour shown when our 'mock branch meetings' and debate became a debacle!

The experience shared with others made the week worthwhile - even those who discussed the Early Learning Centre (thanks Warrington!) learned something! I'm sure we all took away a lot of ideas about how branches should be run.

Big thanks to course tutor Julie, head office staff, National Organiser Andy Reed for the Wednesday and EC member Simon Weller for Thursday. The 15 who attended the course have our members at heart - and if the course was anything to go by our branches are in good hands. Our unity is our strength.

ALAN REID Secretary – Yoker Branch

Thanks to Bristol

I AM writing to express my gratitude to the officers and members of Bristol Branch 036 for their resolution for financial assistance for me, owing to my ill health problems. I would also like to convey thanks to the Executive Committee for considering and granting this claim.

GRAHAM BELLAMY Bristol Branch

Alf Beales: a man of principle

IT IS with regret that I have to report the passing of 'Chairman' Alf Beales. He was 84.

For many years he served on Bedford's LDC latterly as Chairman. He served with distinction throughout his long term of office through many difficult times when major changes in the industry were taking place resulting in threats to our members' employment prospects. Alf's resolute defence of our members through adhering to the agreements negotiated by ASLEF secured many vulnerable positions. He was a highly principled man who worked assiduously for his fellow workmates throughout his railway career.

His funeral was full to standing at Kettering with a gathering of retired and current members of the Bedford Branch present.

Our thoughts go to his widow, Sheila, and her daughters.

Bill Davies Retired Member - Bedford

Paul Garrett: just 38 years old

IT IS with the greatest sadness that I have to report the sudden passing of Paul Garrett who recently died at the age of just 38 years. Paul became very ill on his return from a canal boat holiday.

A proud railwayman in every sense, Paul began his career as a signal man in Brimsdown box. Promotions in British Rail and Railtrack saw him work various boxes in the Lea Valley and the Southbury loop on the Essex/Hertford border. He ended his life in signalling as shift manager at Liverpool Street IECC.

But Paul found his true vocation when his career changed to train driving with Virgin Trains at Euston. He was a 'driver's driver': solid and dependable, Paul was a kind, articulate and charitable man with a smile and sense of humour that brightened any day.

A regular branch attendee and a co-opt LLC man, Paul was tipped as an ASLEF rep before his tragic death, just 5 days before he completed 20 years service. The large attendance at his funeral reflected the esteem in which he was held.

He always made you feel you were part of his family when you were around him – and we all share the loss felt by his mother Patricia and other family members.

Paul was a well travelled man, but always loved walking in the English countryside, where he now rests.

Cliff Holloway Euston Branch

Ian McFeteridge: a sad loss

SADLY I have to report the death of our member Ian McFeteridge who was only in his 40's when he died suddenly. He originated from Glasgow, latterly Polmadie, where he was made redundant, moving to Bedford with seven other colleagues.

More recently he suffered ill health but managed to return to work as a 'shed' driver before his health deteriorated again leading to his untimely demise.

His final journey was back to Glasgow for his funeral, attended by representatives of ASLEF.

Our thoughts are with his family at this difficult time.

Bill Davies Retired Member - Bedford

Joe Berry – a man amongst men

JOE BERRY chose the music to be played at the celebration of his life at Putney Vale Crematorium on 31 May. How typical of the man that the closing music was 'Always Look on the Bright Side of Life.' He retired from the railways in April 1986 after 49 years on the railway.

Joe, who was originally based at Wallington depot, came from a railway family – his father was a driver who represented the union on the LDC and his brother Len also worked at Wimbledon. His grandfather was a stoker at Battersea gas works. Joe was a busy activist within ASLEF, he was secretary of the Wimbledon branch for many years and was renowned as an astute negotiator on the LDC committee. A close colleague of former general secretary Ray Buckton, Joe will also be remembered for – with the help and encouragement of his wife Sue - arranging the children's Christmas party at Brunswick House at Vauxhall for many years.

At the outbreak of World War II, Joe was in the Royal Artillery and during the Blitz was stationed on the guns at Woolwich docks. He joined the Parachute regiment in 1943 when in Africa. In 1944, at Arnhem he was shot twice and captured by the Germans but escaped and spent 2 months on the run behind German lines. When re-captured he escaped several times again only to be chained to his bed having had all his clothes taken from him. Joe remained in captivity to the end of the war being released by the Russians and making his way back to the British lines.

This remarkable man, at the age of 73 took part in a re-enactment to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the assault – and actually parachuted into Arnhem once again! He was one of only seventeen who jumped from the original 10,000 who landed in 1944. He was a modest man, so not many people would know that Joe once leaped between two trains to rescue a small child. What a man! I doubt that we will see his like again.

Our sincere condolences go to Joe's wife Sue, son Mike and daughter Susan.

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KEEPING TRACK *WHAT THE UNION WAS DOING 100 AND 50 YEARS AGO*

This look at events in ASLEF 100 and 50 years ago reveals that an independent drivers' union was considered as vital a century ago as it is now – and paints a wonderful picture of how we spent our Bank Holidays five decades ago ....

100 YEARS AGO

The Locomotive Journal of August 1907 gave this fiery account of a mass meeting of locomotive enginemen, firemen and cleaners at the Temperance Hall in Sheffield's Townhead Street on 16 June ...

Mr.W.Clarken said: "Our chairman this afternoon has dwelt upon the amalgamation of railway servants. I go one further. I do not want amalgamation of railwaymen, I want amalgamation of the whole of the workers of Sheffield.

"But if amalgamation takes place, can a guard go and represent you? We, as enginemen, say they cannot. (Interruption.) While you remain Liberal and Tory you cannot have it. Why do I say so? I say it because we see to-day in the House of Commons the Tory party, the Liberal party, and the Liberal-Labour members – the jackals that profess to represent the trade union element, but don't – hand in glove with all the magnates of the gigantic financial concerns of the country.

"We have it on good authority that out of 581,000 railway workers not 100,000 are organised. We know why the all-grades movement was floated -it was to stop the locomotive-men from getting any better conditions. If the locomotive-men intend to do themselves any good they will have to join the Associated Society; we do not forget the "bottom dog," we have a respect for everybody, but we have no respect for men who won't organise. You do not at present respect each other, and until you do there is not much chance of amalgamation coming about."

50 YEARS AGO

In the August 1957 Journal, J.D. Jones offered this splendid portrait of the Brits enjoying their time off work...

" By the time these words appear in print Great Britain will be beginning to recover from its third Bank Holiday hangover of 1957.

"The day starts with an extra cleansing of the very young and all that goes with beauty-parlor treatment. The real head of the family (Mum) will have been up since dawn preparing food which is packed into cartons, which are later placed in the family car, hereinafter referred to as chariot.

"Arrival at the seaside is a signal for the whole family to show signs of madness - clothing is discarded, and bulges that are usually cleverly disguised are bravely exhibited. It is not long before Mum and possibly Mum-in-law start preparing for the midday meal, which is composed of bread lined with limp lettuce, tomatoes, hard-boiled eggs, and of course, flasks of tea.

"The meal over, the elders will withdraw to suitable chairs where "Pop" will lead in the ancient ritual known as "afternoon nap"; a dutiful offspring will have placed a large handkerchief over his face.

"As evening draws near...the whole family will join in what is the most important ritual of the day. THE CEREMONIAL SCATTERING OF LITTER – this is when unwanted china, bottles, cartons, paper bags and newspapers are scattered to the four winds."

Rail Union Learning: Skills for the Struggle

Next year will mark the 120th anniversary of the "Matchgirls' strike" of Bryant and May workers. They were forced to work in conditions in which they developed "phossy jaw", a cancer caused by regular contact with yellow phosphorus. Their pay of under 5 shillings a week was reduced by fines for talking, dropping matches and going to the toilet - whilst their owners made monstrous profits.

These girls were different because they could read and write. When Annie Besant published her first story about their conditions in The Link the factory owners attempted to force their workers to sign a statement that they were happy with the working conditions. Whilst illiterate workers might have signed, forty of these women indignantly refused to sign a statement they knew to be untrue. The factory bosses sacked the group and 1,400 women walked out in protest.

The strike was well organised and made use of the women's writing skills to elicit sympathy in the press. Three weeks later Bryant and May gave in and agreed to their demands. This was the first strike won by an ordinary group of working class women in the UK.

If they hadn't been able to read and write they wouldn't have known what they were signing and they wouldn't have been able to state their case to the general public. Teaching these skills has always been a key role of the trade unions.

Today research shows that workers who improve their English and Maths skills have better chances of promotion, or of moving to jobs with better pay. They are more motivated, more creative in dealing with problems and better able to communicate with the public. They are more loyal. Clearly, some employers don't want loyalty, creativity and upward mobility for their workers! But as a trade union, we want this for our members.

Better English and Maths skills are essential to our members' chances of improving their position in the workplace and in wider life. Improving them has always been part of the trade union role. Ask your ASLEF rep to put you in touch with your local Union Learning Rep for further information.

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Mel stepped on to the footplate at the grand old age of 43

The driver who arrived at Euston - 40 years late

MEL THORLEY steps down from the footplate of the Ascot Special at Birmingham New Street with the smile of a contented man. He shakes hands firmly and in his pronounced North Cheshire accent tells me that there's days he enjoys himself so much he feels he really shouldn't pick up his wages. ('Just a joke,' he adds after a couple of moments. 'I don't want to give anyone ideas!')

It's over forty years since young Mel Thorley left Stockport Grammar School. He wanted to work on the railways – either with his Uncle Sid, a wet-pit foreman at Gorton, his dad, a C&W foreman at Buxton or maybe his Uncle Ted, a driver at Edgeley. Mel loved the railways – the grandson of 'an 1889 Heaton Mersey man', he remembers reading his father's railway and union journals, and at the age of 13 he recalls going to Derby Open Day and seeing the brand new D3992. But his mother 'persuaded' him against a career on the railway ('You can do better than that') and instead he started as a management trainee at his local hospital. It was a wise choice, his father told him: 'The rail industry is finished.'

For the next 25 years Mel edged around more careers than a track's got sleepers. He pumped petrol, put out fires and drove lorries. He sold cars and insurance. But in the back of his mind there was always the railway.

Then one day in 1989 he saw vacancies for guards at Manchester Piccadilly advertised in the Manchester Evening News. He joined up and at one stage Mel found himself 'guarding' for men who had 'fired' for his grandfather!

'By this time I was running 25 years late,' Mel says. 'If I wanted to be a driver – and who doesn't? - I had some catching up to do!

'My traction inspector wasn't encouraging. He told me that - at the ripe old age of 42 - I was too old for the footplate.'

Undeterred, two years later Mel passed out as an EMU driver at Longsight and began to train on AC locos. 'I shall never forget the day I first drove a Manchester to London express,' Mel smiles. 'Even if I only took it as far as Wilmslow! Or the day in May 1991 when my daughter Paula was my guard!'

He says Longsight was his 'dream depot', and he was instrumental in kick-starting the Open Weekend that drew 30,000 visitors in 1992. But two years later the depot closed, and Mel was bound for Manchester Piccadilly. 'I'd missed out again - this time on the diesel Loco course,' he says. 'So I transferred to RFD at Crewe where I passed out on 47s. What a pleasure it was to learn the Crewe to Carlisle route and take freight over Shap!'

Would you be prepared to be featured in future editions of this column, or know someone who would be a good subject? If you do, please let us know at the ASLEF Journal, 9 Arkwright Road, London NW3 6AB or journal@aslef.org.uk

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DOUBLE ACT: Mel's daughter keeps guard while dad drives

But for Mel, like so many others, the era seemed to close when the industry was privatised. 'I thought maybe my father had been right all those years ago and the industry was finished,' Mel says. 'With a heavy heart, I walked away.'

But you don't keep a railway addict down and four years later, Mel was back, instructing on the newly introduced Class 98 MPVs. By 2002 he had his main line ticket back with West Coast Railway and twelve months later he was working 'the dream' - EWS's Orient Express link. That was also the year he finally drove a train into Euston. 'After 40 years of trying, I'd arrived!' he smiles.

Since then, Mel has taken the controls of the Grand National Orient Express out of Liverpool Lime Street, a Chelsea Footex to his 'old home' of Manchester Piccadilly and he's driven 16-coach Caledonian sleepers, and gone round the Edinburgh 'Sub'. Last year, at the age of 59, Mel even learned new traction, which gave enormous satisfaction to a man who had been deemed 'too old for the footplate' 17 years previously. 'I also passed out on 08 shunters this year – for the third time!' he chuckles. 'I'd done it in 1993 and 1996 as well. And do you know – the most recent time I did it was on IEMD0 (108824) – which turned out to be exactly the same loco, D3992, I'd seen brand-new when I was a boy of 13!

'I'm also about to learn Class 92s - so I'm back on electric locos after ten and a half years.'

'It's been a wonderful career,' Mel says, 'I've done things not everyone achieves on the rail. I've been lucky - even if I've only managed to scrape together 13 year's service.'

Mel's a friendly sociable and amusing man, and it's a pleasure to speak with him, perched as we are on the end of New Street's platform four. 'It's the only job in the world where you can actually enjoy a friendly insult at three in the morning,' he jokes. 'There's not many jobs where you almost get to sixty and you're still learning – and it's still a joy.'

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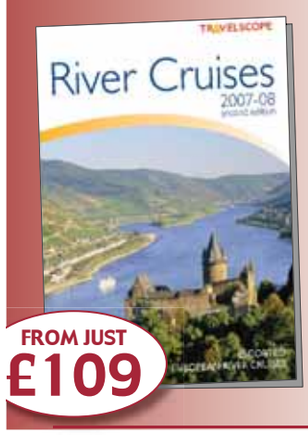

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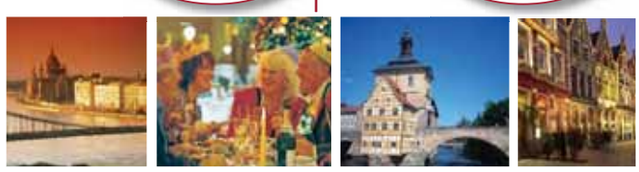

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YOU TELL US

These are the pages where you talk to us. We welcome your letters, either by mail to the Journal at 9 Arkwright Road London NW3 6AB or by email to journal@aslef.org.uk

Because of our space constraints, please try to keep your contributions as short as you can.

This month we continue our STAR LETTER feature. The immensely lucky winner will pocket a rich range of ASLEF regalia!

No argument on climate …

Iain Urquhart misses the point when he asks for the counter argument about Climate Change. There is no counter argument because there is overwhelming evidence that - although some natural warming may be occurring - there is no denying that Man's activities are speeding up the process.

I can only assume that Iain's unwarranted hostility to the idea of climate change is due to him not being prepared to alter his lifestyle to reduce his own impact. (I hope he doesn't own a gas guzzling 'Chelsea Tractor'!) Unfortunately there is insufficient space here to discuss the science, but he reveals by his comments that he does not understand the issues.

We should all be thankful that we work for the least polluting form of transport that is currently available, and as climate change awareness continues to increase, we should continue to highlight this as a real advantage of train travel.

T. Peters Feltham Electric

… Or is there?

I totally agree with Iain Urquhart (Journal, July 2007) about Climate Change. I too was surprised that ASLEF printed this one sided view.

I, as Iain, don't think we are responsible for Global Warming as is generally believed. We have been brain-washed by the government and the media and ASLEF has bought it! Volcanoes produce the most CO2 - so what would happen if there was a sudden increase in volcanic activity? This is something completely out of our control – and the planet would just have to cope with all the extra CO2, wouldn't it?

Global warming was actually invented in the 1980s by Margaret Thatcher to stuff the miners and bring in Nuclear Power. Now it's just an excuse to get more tax out of us, be that in fuel tax or congestion charges. So please don't believe this rubbish of Climate Change. It's perfectly natural. It was actually warmer in the 14th and 15th centuries than it is now - and there were no internal combustion engines around in those days.

We're being conned!

David Hardy Northern Rail - Gateshead and Newcastle Branch

… Yes, there is!

Interesting to read the article in the June Journal 'Climate Change, Proven Fact or Media Scare'? You say climate change is man-made. I believed that to be true until I saw a Channel 4 programme called 'The Great Global Warming Swindle'. Now I believe the 'science' - or lack of it - is seriously flawed. The spin that comes from the government and media is utter nonsense.

The programme said global warming and cooling has always been here but it is not man-made. The carbon dioxide produced by man is very small compared to natural emissions like volcanic eruptions. According to top scientists, global warming/cooling comes from the sun, and sunspot activity!

Where did this theory of man-made global warming come from? In the 70s a Swedish scientist claimed, but couldn't prove, that possibly CO2 emissions could cause the climate to warm up – but it was Margaret Thatcher who, looking for a way to hammer the miners, encouraged the link between climate and fossil fuel.

No counterpoint was offered to your argument. You have taken the government line hook line and sinker. Carbon footprints, offsetting, carbon credit, predictions of this and that, is not proven scientifically.

Man-made global warming is a red herring. The profligate waste of energy and the amount of consumption is the problem, not carbon dioxide emissions.

The Journal should not be adding to the hype. You should watch the TV programme and draw your own conclusions. The last paragraph in the article said it all – Hot Air Results'

David Forrest - Birmingham Branch

Thanks for the x ..

I would like to say a sincere 'thank you' to the membership of District No. 5

Big Brother in the cab?

I have been told by a passenger company manager that they are considering putting cameras inside the cab of their units. If correct this is very disturbing news. Where one company leads others will follow. With today's technology you can be watched in real time as you are working with your behaviour closely scrutinised. In the narrow confines of a cab the camera will be focussed on you in fine close detail, probably with sound recording as well; all the time. They will say it is about safety - but what will this actually mean for you?

Never mind a surreptitious cigarette; you won't be able to pour yourself a coffee or eat a biscuit. What if you need to take a couple of Aspirin because the lousy seat is giving you backache? What if you need to adjust your clothing in a personal way or scratch your bum? Will you be taken off for yawning or rubbing your eyes at some horrible unsocial hour? What if you talk to yourself? If you have a road-learner in the cab you could be sacked for saying a few words. How will female colleagues feel knowing that some anonymous male manager could be gawping at their every movement?

Constant observation will cause stress. Could the cameras cause psychological stress leading to mental health problems? Will the cameras actually make us ill? We are not goldfish and should not be forced to spend our working lives in a bowl; every one of us needs privacy.

Most of you have potentially many years driving ahead of you. Do you want to be watched and overheard every single second? Please get to your branch meeting and start putting on the pressure to make sure that this frightening development is killed off before it happens. Once the cameras are in they will be there for ever.

Arno Brooks Chairman - Knottingly and Ferrybridge Branch

for re-electing me as their Executive Committee Member.

I look forward to continuing our work with the members and representatives along with my colleagues on the Executive Committee over the next few years for the betterment of our membership and the trade union movement in general. Thank you again.

Nigel Gibson - Executive Committee Member - District No 5

.. And again

I write to express my gratitude to the members of District No 7 for re-electing me to the Executive Committee for a further 4 year term of office. I was pleased to win on the first ballot and I would like to thank Miles Bidgood (Plymouth), John Boreham (Carmarthen) and Brian Jones (Swansea) for the friendly constructive and professional way they conducted their campaigns.

As a socialist I have always argued that democratic elections are good for ASLEF. I feel that this result endorses my views and actions as an EC Member and gives me a clear mandate to continue to strengthen the organisation, build unity and to pursue our progressive policies in the workplace.

Bryan Davies Executive Committee Member – District No 7

Great memories and good luck

After a long illness I have taken early retirement and would like to thank you for your help and support during this difficult time. After being on the footplate since 1976 it was time to reassess my future due to health concerns.

Many thanks to colleagues at my Reading depot and the ASLEF social fund for the financial help kindly given. Special thanks to Steve Gollop, Shaun Moore, Dave Nordigge, Iain McKenzie, Ken Cockell, Gary Triggs and many others. I would also like to mention all of my friends and colleagues from my days working on the Chiltern Line when I was a driver at Marylebone, great times and great memories.

Good luck and best wishes to all.

Martin Wilson Driver

Back on the footplate

I'm writing to say a big 'thank you' to District Organiser No 6 Mick Whelan for his support in helping me with my problem regarding the SMD policy at Central Trains and for getting me re-instated to driving duties. I would also like to thank New Street LLC, especially Bill Goode and all my colleagues at New Street for their support.

Driver Bill Sanders New Street

Certified sick?

I am writing to raise the subject of Medical Certificates required by my company (Southeastern) for short term sickness. Under current legislation any absence from work of less than 7 days can be self-certified and is accepted in all other forms of employment.

Yet within the railway industry (as far as I know) a medical certificate is required for all absences irrespective of duration. This is clearly at odds with current statute law and wastes the valuable time of our doctors. Given that a private Medical Certificate has to be paid for, the temptation is there to seek a longer period of absence (i.e. 7 days or more) than might otherwise be necessary in order to get a free certificate, which is obviously not in the companies' interest.

I believe this anomaly dates back to when BR experienced high levels of absenteeism but given that management practice on the railway has now moved into the 20th Century and trying hard to progress to the 21st Century, the systems and controls are now in place by the TOCs to monitor and control sickness within the self certifying framework.

I therefore feel that ASLEF ought to be negotiating with all the TOCs to instigate a change in the absence procedures to allow self certification. Or do the TOC's feel that their systems and managers are not up to the job?

R Thomas London

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CLASSIFIED ADVERTISEMENTS

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NEW! ASLEF LGBT Badges are now available for sale. If you wish to purchase one send a cheque made payable to ASLEF for £5.00 (this includes postage and packaging) to the Equalities Adviser at ASLEF Head Office.

CLASS 90 locomotive Tie Slides, Cufflinks & Badges, available in high quality gold & silver plate. Tie Slides £5, Badges £3.50, Cufflinks £9.00. Postage £1.00 per order. Contact Brian Aitkenhead on 07957403679 or at 19 Pine Close, Rendlesham, Woodbridge, Suffolk, IP12 2GD.

SALISBURY LOYALTY BADGES: Following the 2006 dispute with SWT, Salisbury Branch is able to offer a limited number of unique loyalty badges for sale. Please contact Salisbury Branch Secretary, Tom Corbin, 26 Winding Way, Salisbury, Wiltshire SP2 9EA. will accept postal orders or cheques made payable to Mr T Corbin. Price £4.50including P&P (extra for £0.50 for recorded delivery). Local ASLEF members can purchase directly from the Branch at £3.00 each.

FAVERSHAM CENTENARY BADGE: the Faversham branch was 100 years old on 23 June and will be holding a celebration/presentation evening in September. The branch has struck a limited number of badges (numbered on the back) available at £10 each and plain ones at £5 each – plus £1 p&p. Badges are available from branch secretary Steve Gurdler (steve.gurdler@aslefonline.co.uk).

TRAIN DRIVER requires all ASLEF badges, strike, depot closure & centenary. Also interested in other British Railway badges, small signs & small railway items. Prices negotiable. Please call 0208-569-7381 or 07930-419850

WATERLOO 2006 STRIKE BADGE : High quality hard enamel badge, numbered on the back.Limited to only 100, £4.00 each. Contact Andy Hopkins at crazyhorse6576@hotmail.com or by mail to 39 Tollgate Drive, Hayes, UB4 0NP.

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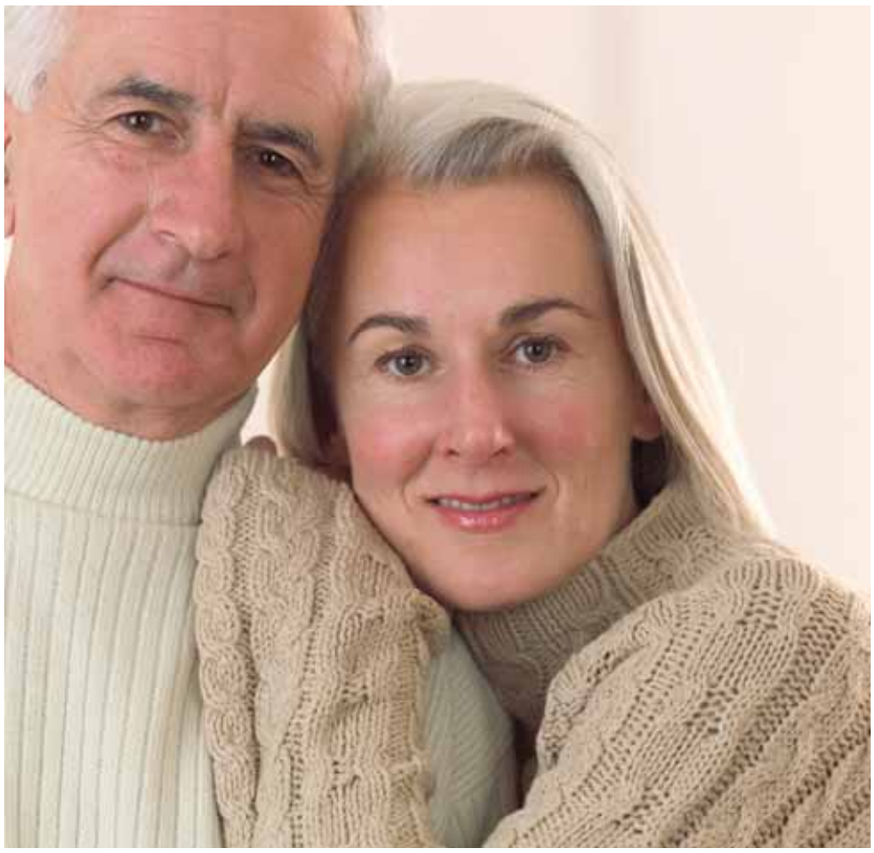


MAKING A WILL IS ESSENTIAL, says Victoria Phillips, the head of employment rights at Thompson Solicitors – but it need not be complicated …

Safeguarding the interests of family, friends and dependants after our death is a priority for most of us. A properly drafted Will can spare family and friends a lot of unnecessary work and heartache at a time when they are least able to cope with it.

Making a Will need not be complicated. ASLEF, through Thompsons, offers a straightforward Wills service which involves simply completing a questionnaire. This cuts out the need to see a solicitor in person. Thompsons will then draft the Will from the information provided. It can be altered or cancelled at any time for an additional fee.

ASLEF's Wills service is available to members and their partners, whether or not they are married and also to same sex couples.

A legally drawn up Will is a written statement of your wishes and enables you to make important decisions that affect family and friends after your death, such as:

- who inherits your estate (ie everything you own)
- who carries out your wishes
- nominating a pension beneficiary
- nominating guardians of your children
- whether to create a trust
- which charities, if any, will benefit from your estate

APPOINTING EXECUTORS

When filling in the Wills questionnaire you will be asked to name an executor. This is the person or persons who administers – or executes – the wishes and affairs of the deceased person. Executors will often be a spouse or adult child or a combination of both.

They may also have to act as a trustee of assets left in your Will to children under the age of 18 and will have the power to pay money for maintenance, education and welfare to the legal guardians of your children, if you have appointed any.

An executor is not prevented from being a beneficiary of your estate.

It is also possible to nominate the solicitors who draw up your Will as executors, or as joint executors with an individual.

Choosing executors should be done with care. The duties imposed by law on executors and trustees can be time consuming and can lead to personal liability if not carried out correctly. They must, for example, obtain a Grant of Probate by going through and listing all of the deceased's assets. This is a complex task which usually requires a solicitor to carry it out. Thompsons has an experienced Probate department which will deal with the administration of estates.

PENSIONS AND OTHER ASSETS

What happens to your pension after your death is likely to depend on the scheme that you are in. Usually however your spouse, if you have one, will be entitled to a percentage of it, but it helps to nominate them as your pension beneficiary as death benefits under a pension scheme are usually distributed at the discretion of the pension fund trustees.

You should therefore let them know of your wishes. Often, they will require you to complete a nomination form indicating whom you would like to benefit. It is a good idea to review these nominations annually.

Death in service benefit is usually a life insurance which ends on your retirement. Again this will be payable if you die in service to the nominated person.

Assets in joint names usually pass to the survivor. If you wish to leave your share of jointly-owned assets to someone other than the co-owner of assets such as property, you may need to take steps to divide the ownership of those assets. If, for example, the jointly-owned asset is your home you should have the wording of the title deeds checked.

DYING WITHOUT A WILL

Dying intestate, that is without a Will, means that everything you own will be divided up under fixed rules decided by law. It is not the case that your estate will automatically go to your surviving partner or children.

The law does not provide for unmarried partners or children who are not biological children, other than adopted children. This means that unless you make a Will there is a real risk that your estate will pass to the Crown, leaving loved-ones with nothing.

● For more information and to download a questionnaire go to http://www.thompsons.law.co.uk/wills/your-will.htm

ASLEF'S legal services - your rights for their wrongs!

FREE LEGAL ADVICE ASLEF also provides first class free legal advice - both for members and for their dependents. In the first six months of this year we have secured £1,442,360 in compensation claims! Call the helpline on 0808 100 8009

EMERGENCIES If you are an ASLEF member who is arrested or being interviewed by the police and need legal assistance – day or night – you can call the members' Emergency Hotline on 07980 996159.

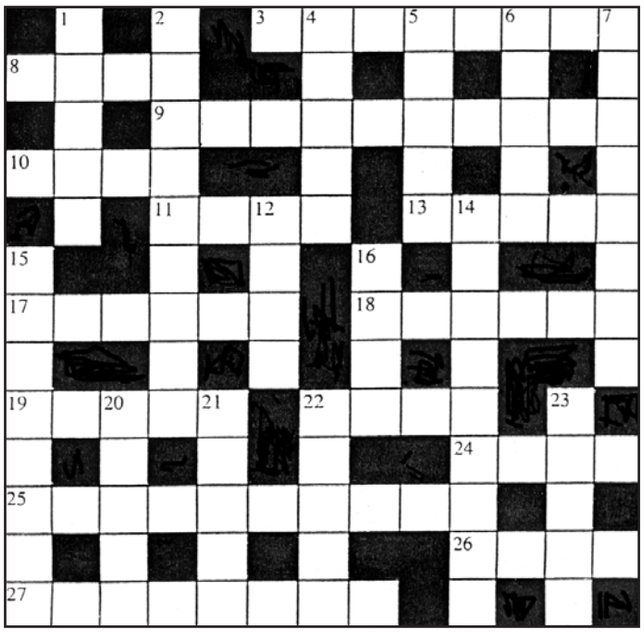
SACKINGS OR OTHER PROBLEMS AT WORK Harassment, discrimination or bullying? If your local, branch or district representative is unavailable, call the Industrial Relations department at union headquarters (020 7317 8600) or email info@aslef.org.uk

ASLEF *more than just a union*

THOMPSONS SOLICITORS

Prize Crossword No. 16

set by TLC



Clues Across

3 Not the best time to travel (4,4)
8 Popular sport with both sexes (4)
9 Underground railway system (4,5)
10 'Park and ….' – a form of city transport (4)
11 Waterside plant (4)
13 One who is careful with money (5)
17 Soak up liquids (6)
18 Gambling establishment (6)
19 Government cash award (5)
22 Certain (4)
24 Communication …. (4)
25 The party in power (10)
26 Classic horse race (4)
27 Fitted to a car to quieten the engine (8)

Clues Down

1 Type of fuel (5)
2 A good time to travel (9)
4 Turn upside-down (5)
5 Separate part of Muslim household reserved for females (5)
6 Leaves out (5)
7 Place to relax until the train is due (4,4)
12 The tide …. and flows (4)
14 On the railway staff (9)
15 They may be found in the 'Left Luggage' office (8)
16 Dull beige colour (4)
20 Used by a blacksmith (5)
21 Italian city (5)
22 Major battle of World War One (5)
23 Apply to stop (5)

The winner of this month's crossword will receive Marks & Spencer vouchers to the value of £25

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Solution to Crossword No 15 which appeared in the July edition of the ASLEF Journal. Congratulations to **R CASTLETON** from **CHELMSFORD, ESSEX**

ACROSS 1 Strangers 8 Engine trouble 11 Rare 12 Stage 13 Firm 16 Idyllic 17 Seymour 18 Plummet 20 Fisheye 21 Page 22 Uncle 23 Zinc 26 Basic Instinct 27 Hypnotist **DOWN** 2 Trip 3 Aseptic 4 Garages 5 Rout 6 Angry young man 7 All in one piece 9 Drainpipe 10 Emergency 14 Climb 15 Gypsy 19 Tension 20 Filmset 24 Pity 25 Miss

Thanks for all your responses to the fifteenth ASLEF crossword in the July edition. If you complete this month's crossword please send the solution to the Editor, ASLEF Journal, 9 Arkwright Road, London NW3 6AB by the 14th of the issue month.

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